

B.C.E.

- 100,000–
75,000 B.C.E. During the middle Paleolithic period in Europe, hunting and gathering peoples are engaging in ritual behavior, including burials and the extraction of the brains of the dead, perhaps for ritual use. In Germany during this period, bear skulls are collected in caves suggesting the worship of bears or other animals. **MISC**
- 50,000–
6500 B.C.E. During this period people enter North America from northeast Asia. By about 12,000 B.C.E. they have settled the entire Americas from west to east and north to south, with the exception of the extreme north, which is settled by about 3000 B.C.E. These peoples are hunter-gatherers whose religions are centered on shamans, religious specialists who communicate with the spirit world, and rites centered on animals. **MISC**
- 40,000–
10,000 B.C.E. During the Upper Paleolithic period in Europe, people are making clay and stone figurines of mammoth, bear, and the human female figure and engraving animal bones. In western Europe people are engraving and painting the walls and ceilings of caves. The figurines may indicate worship of specific animals, women, or fertility and the cave paintings indicate similar beliefs, with the caves serving as the locale for the performance of rituals. Near the close of the period in northern Europe, hunters are participating in annual sacrifices of reindeer, perhaps as a ritual means to ensure a productive hunt. **MISC**
- 10,500 Japanese archaeological sites from around this time (the end of the Paleolithic era) yield burial sites containing grave offerings and evidence of cultural and trade exchanges with mainland Asia. **SHINTO**
- 10,500–
400 B.C.E. In the Jomon Neolithic period in Japan, nomadic bands begin the inhabitation of villages, leaving behind evidence of ceremonial pit houses and ritual objects, including earthen human and animal figures probably used in fertility and hunting rites. Drums and masks from the later part of the period are indicators of shamanism. Communal cemeteries emerge as well. All these artifacts and remains indicate that indigenous religious practices, as precursors of Shinto, are well developed. **SHINTO**
- 10,000–
5000 B.C.E. During the Mesolithic period in Europe, people make ritual objects out of bone that depict animals that are used for ritual purposes. Burials are more elaborate than in the past, with the dead buried with grave goods including stone tools and remains of animals and in some places, burials that are accompanied by ritual activity. **MISC**

-10,000

-10,000–
200 B.C.E.

During the Jomon Neolithic period in Japan, people live by hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants for food. The religious practices that emerge during this period include burials in which the bodies were arranged with jewelry, body mutilations such as teeth removal as part of initiation rites, and the production of clay figurines in human form, often with a body part missing, signifying the use of the figurines for magical purposes, most likely the curing of illnesses.

MISC

-9000–
7000 B.C.E.

During the Mesolithic period in Mesopotamia, hunter-gatherers bury their dead on stone platforms. The dead wear ornamental stone and bone ornaments that perhaps served as amulets, and during the end of the period as more people are living in permanent settlements, people worship at shrines in their dwellings.

CIVIL

-8500

Hallucinogenic drugs are being used by Native Americans in northern Mexico, although it is not known if they are used for religious purposes.

NATIV

-7000–
6000 B.C.E.

During the Neolithic period in Mesopotamia, when people live in permanent farming villages, the dead are buried under the floors of houses and clay figurines of animals and pregnant women are made, perhaps reflecting the presence of animal cults and the worship of a god or forces related to fertility.

CIVIL

-6500–
2500 B.C.E.

Native Americans in Mexico and parts of Central America begin to live in settled communities based on the growing of corn, beans, squash, cotton, and other crops. In these communities new religious beliefs and practices emerge with rituals enacted to ensure a steady supply of food. Ritual specialists, ancestor worship, sacrifice, and a belief in the afterlife were all present by about 2500 B.C.E.

NATIV

-6000

At Jericho in the Middle East, skulls of the deceased are fashioned into masks, suggesting a belief that dead ancestors influence the lives of the living.

CIVIL

-6000–
4200 B.C.E.

During the Ubaid period in Mesopotamia, temples are built on raised brick platforms. The temples are places of worship to local deities. Religion plays a major role in village life, as priests own much land and thereby also exercise considerable political power.

CIVIL

-6000–
3500 B.C.E.

During the early Neolithic period in Europe, people across the continent from south to north gradually shift from a nomadic hunter-gatherer way of life to one supported by farming in settled communities. Settled living is accompanied by an increase in ritual activity, including worship in special buildings in some places; the making of clay figurines, especially of the female form, for ritual worship or use; and animal sacrifice, especially of dogs. In southeastern Europe the ritual use of female figurines is especially common and widespread, suggesting the worship of goddesses.

MISC

- 5000 With people now living in settled communities in the Middle East, priests have become important as community leaders. Their authority is based on their ability to mediate between the human and supernatural worlds and to influence the gods and spirits to provide rain and ample harvests. **CIVIL**
- 5000 Pedomancy, a form of divining done by reading the contours, shape, and lines of the feet, is practiced in China. **SPIR**
- 5000–
3100 B.C.E. During the Predynastic period in Egypt, people believe in an afterlife that is much like life on earth. Burials are elaborate, with many grave goods included, probably to make life comfortable for the deceased in the afterlife. People also worship in animal cults devoted to jackals, sheep, cows, and dogs. These animals are sacrificed and buried with humans and represented in pottery decorations. There is also local worship of various gods and goddesses, including Ptah and possibly Re, the Sun God, who are important later in Egypt. Religious worship is both private and conducted in public sanctuaries by priests. **CIVIL**
- 4200–
3100 B.C.E. During the Uruk period in Mesopotamia, civilization emerges with the appearance of cities, states, and writing. From the cities the rulers control the economy, government, and religion. The temples are the largest and most elaborately decorated structures, with temples dedicated to the worship of deities, such as Anum, the god of the firmament, and Inanna, the goddess of love and war. The temples own much land, employ many people, collect payments, and are the repositories of myths recorded on clay tablets. Priests are politically powerful and rulers cannot gain or maintain power without the support of the priests. **CIVIL**
- 3761 According to the Jewish tradition, this is the year of creation and the first year in the Jewish calendar. **JUD**
- 3500 The legendary kings Yao and Shun create a civilized world through moral persuasion, providing the basis for *ju-chia* (scholarly tradition), according to Chinese historians, which forms the cultural basis for Confucius's hero models, the sage-kings of antiquity. **CONF**
- 3500–
3000 B.C.E. During the middle Neolithic period in Europe, large stone monuments called megaliths are erected across much of Europe. Some are freestanding stones, others are arranged in circles, and others are built as above-ground burial chambers. The deceased are often buried with objects they were associated with in life: men with animals and women with pottery. In southern Europe the use of female figurines in rituals continues, suggesting fertility rites or the worship of goddesses. **MISC**
- 3114 According to the Mayan long count calendar, this is the first year of the current Cosmic era. **NATIV**

-3100

-3100–
2686 B.C.E.

During the early Dynastic period in Egypt, the belief in the divine source of kingship emerges, as reflected in the building of royal tombs for the rulers of the Egyptian dynasties. People continue to worship various deities, priests conduct public services in public sanctuaries, and funerals and burials become more elaborate, with grave goods (including slaves and servants) buried with the wealthy and powerful.

CIVIL

-3000–
1700 B.C.E.

During this time, when the Indus Valley civilization flourishes at such sites as Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, there are elements of religious life that later Jains will cite as proof that Jainism can be traced back to the earliest pre-Vedic days of India's past. One such example are figures of men in what is claimed to be the yoga posture for meditation that the Jains will practice. Beyond such specifics, Jains will claim that the early inhabitants of India generally practiced a faith that is closer to Jainism than the Vedic Brahmanism that is introduced by the Aryans.

CIVIL, JAIN

-3000

Writing and the compilation of written records has become an important component of political power in the Middle East, and in many communities it is the priests who control record keeping and thereby wield much political influence.

CIVIL

-3000

In Greece Zeus is worshiped as the god of the day. Over the next several thousand years, beliefs in his power grow, and by 300 B.C.E. he has become the supreme god of the Greek pantheon and the ruler of all humans.

CIVIL

-2900–
2335 B.C.E.

During the early Dynastic period in Mesopotamia, Sumer emerges as the dominant state in southern Mesopotamia. The region contains over 12 major cities, each with a large and elaborate central temple where residents worship the patron god of the city. The most important god is Enlil, the patron of the centrally located city of Nippur. Royalty are buried in elaborate graves accompanied by rich burial goods and sometimes human sacrifices as well.

MISC

-2800–
1100 B.C.E.

Stonehenge is built in southern England. Although not actually used as a place of worship by Druids, in the 19th century it becomes the locale for pagan festivals.

SPIR

-2686–
2181 B.C.E.

During the Old Kingdom period in Egypt, religion became closely linked to the divine concept of the kingship. Pharaohs are believed to be and portray themselves in grand public spectacles as the sons of the Sun God who rule on earth supported by the priesthood and after death become stars in the sky. Great earth and then stone pyramids, including those at Giza, are constructed as stairways that the deceased pharaohs can take to the sky. Under pharaonic rule Egyptian government is centralized, local pantheons of deities are structured, and a wisdom literature is written that provides rules for daily life based in part on religion.

CIVIL

- 2675 An epic is written about the legendary Mesopotamian king Gilgamesh. The epic contains an account of a great flood that is quite similar to and is later believed to be the basis of the story of the Noahian Flood in the Book of Genesis in the Bible. CIVIL
- 2600–
1800 B.C.E. During the late Neolithic period in Europe, religious practices of the preceding period continue, with the erection of megaliths, burials in above-ground stone chambers, and burial goods buried with the dead. Animals, including pigs, sheep, and goats, are also buried with the dead, indicating the use of animals in religious rituals and sacrifice. People live in tribal societies, and it is likely that public rituals serve the purpose of bringing together different kinship groups within the tribe. MISC

Ancient Greek Religion

The religion of ancient or classical Greece was polytheistic, with Greeks worshipping a hierarchy of gods and other supernatural beings all of whom were believed to directly influence life on earth. At the top of the pantheon of major gods was Zeus, the king of the gods, and then his wife Hera, the goddess of marriage and birth. The other 10 major gods were Poseidon, Hades, Demeter, Artemis, Ares, Aphrodite, Athena, Hephaestus, Hermes, and Hestia. In addition, the Greeks worshiped many lesser gods (such as Dionysus, who controlled specific items such as wine), gods and goddesses of cities and towns, family gods, spirits of ancestors, and heroes, such as the Spartan general Lysander. Depending on their influence, gods and goddesses were worshiped at temples built in their honor, at festivals such as the Olympics (for Zeus), and at altars in the home. The Greeks did not have religious texts in the modern sense but instead relied on myths for the stories of their gods and information about the supernatural world. Considerable time was spent in religious activities, with festivals held throughout the year in many communities and people often involved in cults devoted to a particular god. In some cults members were required to perform secret rituals known as mysteries through which they appealed to the god of their devotion. The best known of the mysteries was the Eleusinian Mysteries, whose members worshiped the goddess Demeter, who they believed would protect them in the afterlife. Priests served as intermediaries between the human and supernatural worlds, especially in important matters, and were consulted for advice about major matters such as waging war. Such priests were called oracles as were the places where the gods were invoked. Greeks also relied on various methods of divination, such as peering into still water for signs from the gods in order to predict the future. Greek religion influenced and was influenced in turn by the various peoples who came under Greek rule. Perhaps most important, Greek religion influenced the Roman Empire, with the pantheon of 12 major gods "borrowed" and renamed by the Romans.

~~-2500~~

- 2500 During the Archaic period Native Americans in California bury their dead in burial mounds, indicating a belief in the afterlife and the worship or veneration of ancestors. **NATIV**
- 2500–
2000 B.C.E. At Mohenjo-Daro, the center of the Indus Valley civilization in southern Asia, female terra-cotta figurines are produced. They may be used for religious purposes and may represent the worship of goddesses. **CIVIL**
- 2500–
1500 B.C.E. The Indus Valley civilization in what is later Pakistan and India is at its height. Although the civilization has declined by the time Indo-Iranian peoples from central Asia begin migrating into the region and then to the south and east, the religious beliefs and practices of the civilization likely influence the migrants. In the 20th century experts do not agree about what influence, if any, the Indus Valley civilization had on the development of Hinduism in southern Asia. **HIND**
- 2500–
1500 B.C.E. In the Andean highlands of South America, the Kotash religious tradition, which is marked by terraced platform mounds, small ceremonial rooms, burial chambers, and friezes with religious themes, develops and flourishes. **NATIV**

Pyramids of Giza

The Pyramids of Giza, now located in a suburb south of Cairo, Egypt, are one of the greatest achievements in the construction of monumental religious architecture in human history. The three large pyramids, several smaller ones, the temples, and the Sphinx were built between about 2528 B.C.E. and 2465 B.C.E. by three Egyptian kings, Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure, as burial tombs for themselves, their queens, and other family members. The Great Pyramid built by Khufu is the largest of the three and is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The pyramids were constructed from limestone blocks so massive as to suggest they reach up to the sun, whose god Re was manifested on earth in the form of the divine kings. The exterior blocks were of light-colored limestone that reflected the sun's rays, adding to the symbolism of the king as a manifestation of Re. One of the great questions that has faced archaeologists, architects, and engineers is how the pyramids were built in the absence of nonhuman forms of energy and even such basic lifting devices as the tackle and pulley. The answer is most likely the Egyptian genius for organizing and managing the labor of huge numbers of laborers, in this case farmers who could not farm during the months when the Nile flooded. They were worked long and hard, with much of the effort going to cutting the huge blocks and moving them up a ramp made from mud, brick, and sand. Once the pyramid was complete, the ramp was removed and the outside stones worked by masons. Although the grave goods in the tombs were looted and the same exterior stones were removed later for other uses, the Pyramids of Giza remain an architectural wonder and a major tourist attraction.

- 2500–
1500 B.C.E. In the Indus Valley civilization of southern Asia, clay seals with figures in yoga postures suggest the practice of yoga as a religious ritual. **CIVIL**
- 2334–
2230 B.C.E. The Akkadians come to power in southern Mesopotamia, and during the rule of Naram-Sin (r. -2254–2217 B.C.E.) the basis of the kingship is redefined, with the king now seen as a god, rather than as an agent of the gods. **CIVIL**
- 2250 In Egypt the scarab beetle symbol is used as a good luck charm. **CIVIL**
- 2112–
2004 B.C.E. During the Imperial period in the Mesopotamian city of Ur, the great ziggurat (mound and temple complex) is expanded as a center for the worship of Nanna, the Moon God. The ziggurat, standing high above the city, also serves a political purpose as the symbol of the power of Ur over the surrounding region. **CIVIL**
- 2000 Native Americans in what would become Louisiana begin living in settled villages supported by agriculture and make ritual objects in the shape of clams, falcons, and owls, suggesting a veneration of nature. **NATIV**
- 2000–
1000 B.C.E. During the Formative period in Mesoamerica, distinctive communities led by chiefs emerge. The chiefs derive some of their authority from their knowledge of and ability to communicate with the supernatural world. Rituals that include bloodletting are practiced, perhaps as a form of sacri-

Ziggurats

The most conspicuous element of Mesopotamian religions were the ziggurats, the large towers crowned by a temple found in all major cities. The best known ziggurats in modern times are the Tower of Babylon, known only from early descriptions, such as that by the Greek historian Herodotus and the ziggurat at Ur, the remains of which were excavated by British archaeologist Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1930s. Most ziggurats in Mesopotamia have disappeared, their stone and clay platforms and stairways turned into dust or plundered for use elsewhere. Ziggurats consisted of a series of brick platforms, one on top of and smaller than the one below. The levels were joined by a series of stairways, and the entire structure was probably topped by a temple. The ziggurat, which could be seen by travelers from miles across the desert, marked the location of major cities and was where the priests conducted the most important rituals. Only the wealthy and powerful could climb the ziggurat; the masses were restricted to observing from below. Although ziggurats were perhaps the first example of this style of religious architecture, the religious monument built to reach toward the sky, the home of the spirits and gods in many religions, is not unique in human history. The pyramids of Egypt, Mesoamerica, and South America; the mounds of North American Indians; the great cathedrals of Medieval Europe; and even the church spires of New England also display this common theme.

-2000

fice to the gods, and some houses have small shrines, suggesting the worship of personal or family spirits or deities. NATIV

-1991–
1786 B.C.E. During the middle Kingdom period in Egypt, which follows the decline of the First Intermediate period (-2181–1991 B.C.E.), the kingship is humanized, with the pharaohs no longer seen as remote gods. Orisis replaces Re, the Sun God, as the chief god, and massive temples and stone statues are built. CIVIL

-1800 Scribes in Mesopotamia complete the King-list, a sketchy chronological account of the rulers of the region in the third and second millennia B.C.E. Included in the list is reference to rulers before the flood. Floods are a common theme in Mesopotamian myths and legends and it is likely that the biblical Flood is derived from these earlier Mesopotamian sources. CIVIL

-1800 The Israelites, a number of loosely affiliated tribes, migrate into Palestine from Mesopotamia. The region is under Egyptian control at this time and remains so until about 1200 B.C.E. About this time, according to Jewish tradition, Abraham, one of the forefathers of Judaism, recognizes the existence of a supreme god, marking the emergence of Judaism as a monotheistic religion, and also leads his people to Palestine. Abraham is considered to be the ancestor of Jews and is also a major figure in Christianity and Islam. Along with his son Isaac and Isaac's son Jacob, he is considered one of the forefathers of the Jewish community. Their wives Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel are considered the matriarchs of the Jewish community. JUD

-1800–
800 B.C.E. During the Initial period of the development of Andean civilization in South America, ceremonial centers become larger and more elaborate with sunken courtyards, temples, mounds, plazas, and religious carvings. NATIV

-1800–
300 B.C.E. The Olmec culture develops, flourishes, and then declines on the Gulf Coast of Mexico. Various religious beliefs and practices of the Olmec form the basis of later religions in Mesoamerica. Most important is the link between nature and religion, with the Olmecs using caves, hills, earth mounds, and stone carvings to represent religious themes. NATIV

-1800–
200 B.C.E. During the Formative period of the Maya civilization in Mesoamerica, ceremonial cities with large temples develop and by the end of the period some of these centers such as El Mirador have become major political centers as well. NATIV

-1790 In Babylonia Hammurabi creates a separation of church and state when he differentiates between the responsibilities of priests and government officials and when he suggests that he is not a god but merely the "favorite of the gods." CIVIL

-1786–
1567 B.C.E. During the Second Intermediate period in Egypt, lower Egypt comes under the control of the Hyksos, a people who have immigrated into the region from the east. They adopt the existing Egyptian religion. CIVIL

- 1700–
600 B.C.E. During this period the Aryans move into northern and central India and bring their Vedic Brahmanic religion that tends to drive the indigenous religious practices underground. The Vedic Brahmanic religion stresses rituals, animal sacrifice, priests, and elitism; it also encourages the active life, a life of heroic struggle, wealth, power, and plentiful food and drink. It is against such practices and beliefs that the founders of Indian faiths such as Jainism will rebel. HIND, JAIN
- 1600 The Minoan civilization on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea is at its height. The religion centers on the worship of a "mother earth" goddess, veneration of the bull, perhaps as a symbol of the power of nature, and animal and human sacrifice. CIVIL
- 1600 An early form of Judaism begins to develop in Palestine with an emphasis on spirits, ritual cleanliness, and rites for the dead. JUD
- 1570–
1528 B.C.E. As Egypt declines as a regional power, the void in the southern reaches of the empire in Nubia is filled by black African rulers in the city of Kerma in the Kingdom of Kush. It is the first African state, and the rulers borrow many practices, including religious ones from Egypt. The rulers are buried under large mounds accompanied by grave goods, including large numbers of sacrificial victims. AFRICAN
- 1567–
1085 B.C.E. During the New Kingdom period in Egypt the Hyksos are defeated and Egypt is reunited under Egyptian rule. Thebes is the capital city, with religious worship centered on Anum-Re, the Sun God, and the Temple of Anum. Religious celebrations are now controlled by the royalty, as the priests have lost power to bureaucrats, soldiers, and political officials. During the rule of Pharaoh Akhenaten (-1353–1336 B.C.E.), the Great Disk of Amun-Re, called Aten, is elevated to the status of the supreme god, the ruler of all other gods. Experts disagree in the 1990s as to whether this is the first recorded instance of monotheism in human history or whether it is a modified form of Egyptian polytheism. CIVIL
- 1500 Poverty Point Mounds are built and then expanded in subsequent years by Native Americans of the Mississippian cultural tradition in what would later be Louisiana. The mounds and earthworks are likely influenced by Mesoamerican peoples from the south and include temple platforms, wood temples, and enclosures with the space inside considered sacred. NATIV
- 1500 From the sixteenth century B.C.E. on, Rosicrucians attribute the birth of Rosicrucianism to Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III (-1500–1447 B.C.E.), who they believe organized a group that studied mysticism in a way similar to that later adopted by adherents of Rosicrucianism. Rosicrucians in the 20th century do not see Rosicrucianism as a religion but rather as a method of study and learning based on ancient mysticism and metaphysics, designed to enhance personal, spiritual, physical, intellectual, and psychic well-being. SECT